

**Ms. Angela E. V. King**  
**Former Assistant Secretary-General and**  
**Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and**  
**Advancement of Women 1997-2004**

**Statement on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the**  
**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**  
**By the General Assembly of the United Nations**

**13 October 2004, United Nations, New York**

May I express my deep pleasure at being here to share with so many distinguished Chairpersons, Committee experts, delegations, representatives of the UN family and members of non-governmental organizations, the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of this powerful Convention.

Looking back over the past eight and a half years since I took over as Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women in February 1996, and later as Special Adviser, I can attest that the Convention and its Committee have evolved in terms of visibility, focus, achievements and impact.

My first official task on joining the Division was to address this Committee. At that time only 150 States had ratified the Convention, now there are 178. There was only one session a year, now there are two and two pre-sessions. While UN agencies reported on States being monitored, non-governmental organizations had no forum to share their views with the Committee. Now they do and many submit valuable alternate reports on the States parties being monitored. While organized, the working methods have become much more streamlined and time-budgeted. Interaction between the various treaty bodies and among their Chairs has become more frequent and has improved the quality and focus of the work across the board. Above all, then there was no Optional Protocol, not even the drafting committee had been set up and now there is a Protocol with fully working rules, procedures and cases.

Structurally, while DAW served from the Committee's inception in 1982 as its secretariat, not a single extra post had been approved specifically for women's rights activities. With the restructuring of the Division in 1997, women's rights and the substantive and technical servicing of CEDAW emerged as a Unit and is now a Section with a total of eight staff including a technical assistance officer. Specific posts were finally added for the Protocol. The first Chief was Ms. Jane Connors.

Madame Moderator, these may seem to be rather arbitrary benchmarks of progress. They are nevertheless noteworthy.

CEDAW, both the Convention and the Committee, are now widely known, used and researched. In the many statements earlier, we have heard of its impact on national

legislation and jurisprudence. None of this could have occurred without the networking and partnerships promoted by the Chairs of the Committee, its members and a series of other key actors: States parties, UN agencies, departments in the Secretariat, the Commissions on the Status of Women and on Human Rights, the other treaty bodies and chairs and the NGOs.

States parties collaborated by hosting workshops and meetings notably in Madrid, Berlin, Lund and most recently Utrecht. With their support judges from a variety of legal systems met to learn by exchanging views on the experience in other countries, at several judicial colloquia including in Vienna, Arusha and Nassau, Bahamas. Many other States have funded specific publications, meetings or training projects.

Our distinguished Chairs have shown how their leadership makes a difference. I pay special tribute to the four distinguished friends who are here today: Mss. Corti, Khan, Abaka and Acar. But I also remember with pride those who are not here, Ms. Luvsandanzangyn Ider of Mongolia, a long time member of the Third Committee, who assisted in drafting her country's Constitution and whom I met again in Ulan Bator in 1991, Justice Desiree Bernard, now Chief Justice of Guyana, Ms. Elizabeth Evatt, now actively retired, and Ms. Mervat Tallawy, a former Ambassador and Minister of Government, who is now one of the six women Under-Secretaries-General in the Secretariat and who heads the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) in Beirut. Of course I also pay tribute to Ms. Aida Gonzalez Martinez who has had many roles in her foreign service and at the UN starting in 1974 as a member of the Mexican delegation on the Preparatory Committee for the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico in 1975.

Although I have worked closely with the Committee only since 1996, I did have the privilege while in Vienna on another mission of attending several of its meetings in 1983, at its second session. Ms. Ider was in the Chair and I well remember how the Secretary, Ms. Inger Krydt, together with Ms. Sjamsiah Achmad, now an expert and Ms. Philomena Kintu of the Secretariat, were running about trying to ensure that the meeting was a success.

The members of the Committee—all women with the exception of three brave men—have been distinguished as diplomats, academics, judges, lawyers, doctors, public servants and in the private sector. They seem to become even more distinguished after serving with the Committee. One with us today has become a Head of State, another has become Vice-President of the International Criminal Court, yet others are ambassadors of their countries, professors, or a Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, or ombudsman. Their dedication, commitment and multidisciplinary skills have also played a major role.

Another area of inter-agency cooperation and partnerships has been with the UN agencies. The Cairo meeting in 1998, jointly sponsored by UNICEF and DAW on the rights of women and children was a landmark. UNFPA and DAW have played interlocking roles in promoting the sensitive issue of women's reproductive rights and

health. UNIFEM has organized several training workshops on the Convention. Some of the Heads of UNDP Regional Bureau have made a point of including CEDAW in their discussions with Governments. One even promised two years ago that he, and I underline he, would endeavour to pave the way with government officials for removing remaining hitches to ratification and sure enough, that States party is among the last three to ratify the Convention this year. To this group I would add the invaluable support of the world's parliamentarians through the Inter-Parliamentary Union and our joint handbook on CEDAW. The ILO, FAO, UNESCO and WHO have given regular comprehensive reports to the Committee over the years.

Partnerships have also been strengthened within the Secretariat. At the instigation of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Office of Legal Affairs organized that the Conventions relating to women and children would be opened for official signing and ratification during the historic Millennium Summit in September 2000. Several States availed themselves of this offer, including Saudi Arabia which ratified the Convention. DPI has also played a vital role in drawing the public's attention to the Concluding Comments of the Committee. No list would be complete without mentioning the unwavering support, data and information which we received from Mrs. Mary Robinson, Mr. Bertie Ramcharan and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights over this period, especially on the preparations for and resources required in connection with the Optional Protocol.

Since 1996, I have been especially pleased to see the close partnership between CEDAW and the Commission on the Status of Women. Both entities have become stronger and more coherent as a result. This has impacted on the thinking, programmes and outcomes for women all over the world. In both, the byword has been implementation. The Committee's close monitoring of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly has brought a unifying element on the issue of women's advancement to global discourse. This approach has paid off. On the *WomenWatch* website you can see how many States now cite CEDAW as influencing changes in the constitution, family and penal codes and other areas, in their responses to the questionnaire on the ten-year review and appraisal of progress made for Beijing+10, to be discussed by the Commission next year.

In our review of progress we should also reflect on the landmarks that would never have happened had there been no CEDAW. Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security is one such. On 31 October we celebrate its fourth anniversary. Women in countries newly gaining the right to participate in democratic processes whether after colonialism or armed conflict, such as Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, or Rwanda, for example, have clamoured for their rights under the Convention, as have those in Congo, Burundi, Iraq, Liberia and Sierra Leone. As we view these examples, we can see hope for the women and men of Darfur, Haiti and other war-torn areas.

Finally, as you yourself said, Madame Moderator, many challenges lie ahead. A major one is developing the institutions and mechanisms that make laws come alive and the necessary funding for their sustainability.

In closing, I wish to pay tribute to the hardworking and thoughtful Director, Ms. Carolyn Hannan, the Chief of Section, Ms. Christine Brautigam, the Secretary of the Committee, Ms. Philomena Kintu, the staff of the Women's Rights Section and the entire Division. Now that I have left the Organization, I can truly say that without their support and tireless commitment to women's human rights and to the seamless functioning of the Committee under its mandate, the United Nations could not have reached where we are today on women's advancement.

I wish the Committee and its members and partners, another quarter century of solid work and success. We look to you to continue to expand the scope of the Convention through recommendations such as those on violence against women, health, including HIV/AIDs, and female genital mutilation, and affirmative action, to name only a few. We also look to you to find the convincing incentives and incisive monitoring to ensure that States live up to their obligations, so that women throughout the world will finally gain the full enjoyment of their rights and freedoms equally with men.

The past twenty-five years holds the promise of your success. My friends, my best wishes go with you.

\* \* \* \*\*